

Contact Zones and Fashion Hubs: From Circular Economy to Circular Neighbourhoods

Authors : Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, Marissa Lindquist

Abstract : Circular Economy (CE) is increasingly seen as the reorganisation of production and consumption, and cities are acknowledged as the sources of many ecological and social problems; at the same time, they can be re-imagined through an ecologically and socially resilient future. The concept of the CE has received pointed critiques for its techno-deterministic orientation, focus on science and transformation by the policy. At the heart of our local re-imagining of the CE into circularity through contact zones there is the acknowledgment of collective, spontaneous and shared imaginations of alternative and sustainable futures through the creation of networks of community initiatives that are transformative, creating opportunities that simultaneously make cities rich and enrich humans. This paper presents a mapping project of the fashion and textile ecosystem in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Brisbane is currently the most aspirational city in Australia, as its population growth rate is the highest in the country. Yet, Brisbane is considered the least “fashion city” in the country. In contrast, the project revealed a greatly enhanced picture of distinct fashion and textile clusters across greater Brisbane and the adjacency of key services that may act to consolidate CE community contact zones. Clusters to the north of Brisbane and several locales to the south are zones of a greater mix between public/social amenities, walkable zones and local transport networks with educational precincts, community hubs, concentration of small enterprises, designers, artisans and waste recovery centers that will help to establish knowledge of key infrastructure networks that will support enmeshing these zones together. The paper presents two case studies of independent designers who work on new and re-designed clothing through recovering pre-consumer textiles and that operate from within creative precincts. The first case is designer Nelson Molloy, who recently returned to the inner city suburb of West End with their Chasing Zero Design project. The area was known in the 1980s and 1990s for its alternative lifestyle with creative independent production, thrifty clothing shops, alternative fashion and a socialist agenda. After 30 years of progressive gentrification of the suburb, which has dislocated many of the artists, designers and artisans, West End is seeing the return and amplification of clusters of artisans, artists, designers and architects. The other case study is Practice Studio, located in a new zone of creative growth, Bowen Hills, north of the CBD. Practice Studio combines retail with a workroom, offers repair and remaking services, becoming a point of reference for young and emerging Australian designers and artists. The paper demonstrates the spatial politics of the CE and the way in which new cultural capital is produced thanks to cultural specificities and resources. It argues for the recognition of contact zones that are created by local actors, communities and knowledge networks, whose grass-roots agency is fundamental for the co-production of CE’s systems of local governance.

Keywords : contact zones, circular cities, fashion and textiles, circular neighbourhoods, australia

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